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ABSTRACT

A 10-week course called "Communiclearsory" Training was developed to improve the written and oral communications skills of supervisors/foremen in the manufacturing trades. A total of 39 selected supervisors from 2 manufacturing industries in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, were assessed by using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and other assessment instruments. The assessment results were used to develop a curriculum providing instruction and practice in the oral and written workplace communication tasks typically performed by supervisors in their workplace. Two groups of supervisors (39 in all) attended before- or after-shift classes 3 hours each week while receiving their normal salaries. During the course, the supervisors achieved a mean gain of 2.8 grade levels on the language section of the TABE and significant gains in form completion and memo writing assessments; however, they did not demonstrate significant gains in oral communication skills. Management evaluations of the program were positive. (Attached is a curriculum containing the following: course rationale; outline of the course's structure, goals, outcomes, evaluation instruments/methods, and design; and overviews of the instructor and class activities planned for each of the 20 course sessions.) (MN)

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ED 376 331

"COMMUNICLEARSORY" TRAINING:

A TOOL FOR WORKPLACE LITERACY

A 353 PROJECT FINAL REPORT

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"Communiclearsory" Training: A Tool For Workplace Literacy

A 353 Project Final Report

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Fiscal Year: 1993 - 1994

Grantee: The Schuylkill Intermediate Unit #29
P.O. Box 130, Maple Avenue
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Project Number: 98-4046

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ABSTRACT PAGE

Title:	"Communiclearsory" Training: A Tool for Workplace Literacy		
Project No:	98-4046	**Funding:**	$8,035.00
Project Director:	Lyn Leto	**Phone:**	544-9131
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Purpose: "Communiclearsory" Training is a ten-week course to develop the written/oral communication skills of supervisors/foremen in the manufacturing trades. The supervisors in this course were blue-collar workers who were promoted because of excellent work skills, but who had never received training in communicating work-specific information to their co-workers in a clear manner. The course provided instruction and practice in the oral and written skills of the targeted supervisors in order to facilitate the effective and efficient transfer of work-specific information through speaking and writing.

Procedures: Targeted supervisors were evaluated on their speaking and writing skills using the TABE writing subtest; memo writing exercise; workplace form completion; oral communications skills evaluation scale; and managerial assessments. Using the results of these assessments, a curriculum was developed and implemented which provided instruction and practice in the area of oral and written workplace communication pertaining to supervisors' job tasks. The same assessments were used as post course evaluations.

Summary of Findings: Comparisons of the pre and post course assessments showed significant class gains on the TABE, memo writing and workplace form completion, and subjective evaluation by management; however, overall results of the oral communications evaluation did not evidence a significant gain. Management evaluations were positive in regard to increased writing skills and improved workplace form completion; management did not note gains in speaking skills.

Comments: Evaluation results showed that this course was effective in building workplace-specific written communication skills in non-professional supervisors/foremen in the manufacturing industries. However, it is believed that the ten-week, 3 hour per week course schedule was not enough time to adequately build speaking skills. A major problem to course implementation was the fragmented communication systems within the management level of each industry. The project supervisor was thwarted in achieving a smooth transition from planning to implementation by inability of pertinent managers to meet and agree on schedules and plans of action. In addition, miscommunication between industry management and the supervisors targeted for training led to negative feelings which impacted project effectiveness.

Products: A ten week hands-on writing/communications curriculum to increase the skills of supervisors/foreman working in the manufacturing industry.

INTRODUCTION:

Supervisors/foremen in area business and industry are promoted from entry-level positions and do not possess the written and oral communications skills for effective team work. Supervisors are promoted because of excellent job performance. However, skilled job performance is no longer sufficient upon assuming supervisory responsibility. Now job skills must be partnered with the ability to explain clearly to others how to perform a task well. They also need the skills at this new position to provide written feedback to other shift supervisors as well as to workers under their supervision.

Management in two industries who have been involved in our workforce literacy program had noted the escalating need for improved written and oral communications in order to improve efficiency and safety on the job. Since the supervisors in these industries are blue collar workers with no more education than the employee on the line, they are, as supervisors, promoted to an upper echelon with no qualifications other than the attitude and skills for excellence in skilled labor. With the changing, more complex workplace, low-level skills in communications can prove costly, dangerous, and may also prove to be a detriment to the future employment of employees in an underskilled supervisor's charge. A supervisor's ability to communicate clearly affects his subordinates' chances of performing a task that is not clearly understood. In effect, supervisors' communication skills jeopardize the supervisors' employment. This curricula was designed to remedy this double-edged problem.

This report will be useful to trainers/providers of adult education in workplace settings. Copies of this report and the project curriculum is available from the following:

The Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education Programs
The Pennsylvania Department of Education
Twelfth Floor
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

ADVANCE
PDE Resource Center
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

The Western Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Resource Center
5347 Route 8
Gibsonia, PA 15044

BODY OF THE REPORT:

With the rapidly-escalating skill requirements of the new workplace, writing and skillful oral communications have joined the ranks of essential basic workplace skills, along with reading and math. Furthermore, with the downsizing trend in American industry resulting in combining job tasks from one employment level to the other, it is now often necessary for blue collar workers to employ some of the skills formally considered tools of those at the "professional" level.

Workplace materials commonly written on a third to seventh grade level are now commonly written on a tenth grade level. This increase in the difficulty of workplace reading materials has produced a corresponding need for many employees to possess evaluated levels of communication skills in writing and speaking.

The changes in the communication skill levels necessary in the modern workplace have produced additional problems in Schuylkill County's manufacturing industries. For while these industries employ college-educated professionals in managerial capacities, employees who fill the roles of supervisors/forepeople do not generally have any education or training beyond a high school diploma. These blue-

collar supervisors have been promoted due to outstanding job performance and attitude which did not include the higher-level communication skills required in their new positions. This situation has led to frustration and to job dissatisfaction for the supervisors and for the management staff.

Supervisors are required to complete workplace forms which convey important information to management. This task is meant to save both management and supervisory time by negating the need for formal, frequent one-on-one meetings. However, management has discovered that the poor writing and spelling skills of the supervisors has led to increased managerial time needed to decipher forms, and often to increased meetings due to the necessity of clarification.

In addition, memo-type writing is also required, for communications with other shift supervisors, work crews, and management. This job task has also caused grievances and frustration on the part of both supervisors and management.

Poor oral communications has been the alleged culprit of many a costly misunderstanding, and management also fears the possibility of worksite accidents due to poor oral directions. In addition, poor oral communications on the part of the supervisors is also blamed for increasing workplace conflicts.

In order to remedy the problems brought about by job promotions to the supervisory level, the "Communiclearsory" Training Course was instituted to promote "clearer" communications between supervisors and their crews, and supervisors and their superiors.

OBJECTIVES

In order to meet the needs of supervisory employees in the manufacturing industries, a curriculum was devised which would produce the following results:

1. Supervisors will improve their technical writing skills levels by at least one grade level as evidenced in the Language section of the TABE.

2. Supervisors will improve their scores on writing samples (workplace form completion and memo writing) by 50% as evidenced by pre and post course results.
3. Supervisors will improve their oral communication skills by 50% as measured by an oral communications scale.
4. Supervisors will improve their written and oral communications ratings by 50% as measured by subjective managerial surveys submitted pre and post course.

PROCEDURES:

The project staff recruited company supervisors through managerial recommendation. Selected supervisors were pretested using the following assessments: Tabe, Language section; memo writing samples; workplace form completion samples; oral communication scale. The project counselor interpreted test results on an individual level with each supervisor; managers were briefed regarding employee performance and indications for instruction.

Classes were scheduled either before or after shift times. Selected supervisors were required to attend class and were paid their normal hourly salaries. Classes consisted of a group of 19, and a group of 20.

All instruction was build on actual workplace situations and related materials. For example, all writing exercises involved the changing day-to-day events of each plant, and real company personnel. Supervisors were required to use actual situations in filling out workforms and to use real problems during role play situations. During the course of this work-specific instruction and practice, trade materials were used as needed. For example, a student evidencing a pattern of

grammar difficulties, as with subject/verb agreement, would be given worksheets and exercises drawn from texts and workbooks. Also, professional videos on communication were used in demonstrating effective and non-effective oral communication techniques.

This project provided a curriculum PLAN of activities with the goal of improving communication skills while the changing workplace itself provided the activity CONTENT. When the PLAN was to teach supervisors how to write better directions, the CONTENT of the class activities was determined by supervisors using that day's work climate. While the instructor planned activities to provide practice in oral communications, she depended on the supervisors to provide the content of the activities.

At the end of the ten-week course, supervisors were tested using the same assessment methods. In addition, managerial evaluation was procured as an additional mode of program effectiveness.

EVALUATION RESULTS:

1. The average pre-test score on the TABE Language section was 5.0. The average post-test score was 7.8, a mean gain of 2.8, using the combined scores of both groups.
2. The average pre-course score on the completion of worksite form completion was 65 out of a possible 100 points. The average post-course score on the same task was 94 out of a possible 100 points, a gain of 48%.
3. The average pre-course score on a memo writing sample was 25 out a possible 100. The average post-course score on the same task was 80 out of 100, a gain of 55 points or 55%.

4. Management's evaluation of supervisory performance showed a postive increase of 95% in the subjective evaluation of writing skills from pre to post course opinion. No difference was noted in supervisors' speaking skills.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. After-work mandatory classes, despite the "pay-for-learning" arrangement, bred hostility among many of the supervisors. Regardless of the pay, many of these adults felt that they were being deprived of their leisure time. Classes such as these would be more successful if student attitudes were more positive. Classes would be more productive if instruction were to be held as part of the work day. Mandatory after-work classes may be an option, but much more in-house work would have to be done by the managerial staff in getting their supervisors to "buy into" the "lifelong learning" concept.
2. It is essential for an educational project supervisor to have access to all key managerial staff when doing program planning. In both of these industries, the human resource personnel were the contact people who met with the project supervisor in planning. However, they were unable to arrange meetings between the project director and the management personnel. Consequently, management personnel, the main conduit of information to the supervisors, received information from the human resource people instead of the project supervisor. Hence, information went the way of "whisper down the alley," causing much miscommunication and resultant misinformation.

Anyone planning to implement a similar course must insist on contact with all personnel involved. Industries who cannot accommodate such a request, unfortunately, should be considered industries unwilling "to pay the price" for this service, and should be eliminated as participants in such a program.

3. An oral/written communications curriculum is a viable concept in presenting communication skills as a cohesive unit. Blending oral and written instruction was desirable in presenting a cross discipline approach and it was also an aid in the development of classes that sustained interest and promoted diverse class activities. However, observations of the teacher and the project director pointed to a need for this class to seque into a training that stressed oral practice more exclusively. Although students learned a lot about oral communication skills, more time was needed for practice in order to produce more positive, demonstrable results.

RESOURCES

1. **APPLIED COMMUNICATION.** American-Cancdian Agency for Instructional Technology. Bloomington, Indiana

2. **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION.** Effectiveness Training Products, Inc. Avon, Connecticut.

3. **ENGLISH EXERCISES.** Contemporary, Chicago, Illinois

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS SCALE

1.	Clarity
2.	Assertiveness
3.	Openness
4.	Reflectivity
5.	Eye contact
6.	Organization
7.	Specificity
8.	Listening
9.	Body language
10.	Empathy

Maximum Total: 100 points

WRITING A MEMO

For today you are the Packaging Supervisor of the Cressona Aluminum Company. Please read the memo directed to you.

TO: Packaging Supervisor

FROM: Tom Hayes, Packaging Technician

SUBJECT: Problem with selecting proper packaging

DATE: November 5, 1993

Since coming to the Packaging Department of the Cressona Aluminum, I have noticed that I and other employees are often delayed because of missing infomation about what packaging material to use. Employees in our department could do a better job if we had the following:

- a list that specifies which products should be packed using what materials
- a set of procedures that tell the correct order for packing each product
- drawings showing the correct packaging for each product

The Packaging Department could function better with this information. It would help new employees learn the correct procedures and would give experienced employees a handy reference.

I would be glad to talk with you about how these suggestions could help our department.

APPLICATION

Imagine that you are writing a memo in response to the one from Tom Hayes. The facts and background you need are listed below. Make sure to follow the conventions for content, grammatical and mechanical correctness, and layout and design. You need to decide what information to include. Then you need to decide the order and organization of the information for the memo. These are the thoughts you have as you start to plan the memo to Tom.

You have decided that Tom's concerns are legitimate and his suggestions are good ones. You will make a list that identifies which packaging materials should be used for each product. This list will be available to the department next week (as soon as you can compile the information and put it in folders for each product). Eventually you hope this information will be included in the parts list for each product. You also like Tom's idea to have established procedures written for packaging each product. Listing the steps will increase the likelihood that everyone follows the same procedure. You'll start working on this immediately, beginning with procedures for the new products. You estimate that it will take you a month to get procedures written for the new products and then another four months to complete procedures for the existing product line. Tom has a good idea about making the drawings available that show correct packaging. You'll have someone start on them immediately. A few will be available in a couple of weeks; microfilming of all the drawings should be done in six weeks. The microfilm will be regularly updated as new products are developed. You're really glad Tom has taken the time to express his concerns about the Packaging Department. His suggestions should make things run more smoothly.

"COMMUNICLEARSORY" TRAINING

A CURRICULUM

A Final Product of "Communiclearsory" Training: A Tool for Workplace Literacy

A 353 Project, #98-4046

"COMMUNICLEARSORY TRAINING"

I. INTRODUCTION

This course is designed as a survey of the communication skills deemed necessary for maximal supervisory function in the workplace, with specific emphasis on Cressona Aluminum. It is in no way an in-depth academic course in communications, but rather a course based on the premise that non-professional supervisory staff can and will benefit from an awareness of the role that communications play in workplace success. Therefore, although the course content is based on sound educational principles and communications theory, its ultimate goal is to produce positive behavioral changes in the targeted adult students. Although there is a program design for the delivery of this educational service to industry, the student strengths and weakness will determine specific content and pace. This is skill-based instruction and will use the actual situations encountered by the supervisors during their workdays. For example, if one outcome is to use learned oral communication skills effectively, the instructor will lead the students in tasks using current workplace concerns. If there should exist a problem with a line employee demonstrating specific task deficiency, supervisors will apply the learned communications techniques in dealing with that specific situation. Students might role-play using the learned techniques of solving employee conflict. Supervisors will also practice writing skills through filling out appropriate evaluation forms and/or writing necessary memos. It is through the integration of formal instruction and practical application that supervisors will learn the basics of effective communications.

II. COURSE STRUCTURE

Two groups of 20 supervisors will meet for 1 1/2 hours twice a week for ten weeks.

III. COURSE GOALS

1. Supervisors will understand the importance of effective communication in the workplace.

2. Supervisors will learn effective speaking and listening techniques.

3. Students will learn the basics of grammar, spelling, sentence and paragraph construction.

4. Students will learn skills necessary for effective technical reading.

IV. OUTCOMES

1. Supervisors will be able to complete all workplace forms.

2. Supervisors will be able to write a legible, clear, and concise memo.

3. Supervisors will demonstrate effective oral communications in the workplace through class-role-play situations and on-the-job situations.

V. EVALUATION

1. Writing

   TABE, Language section

   Memo writing samples

   Workplace forms

2. Oral Communication

   Students' oral communication skills will be graded on a 10 point scale (included). Students will be provided with a Workplace scenario in which they will be required to play the role of a supervisor who must explain to his/her subordinate how to do a new task.

VI. COURSE DESIGN

The following overview illustrates the suggested instructional format to incorporate the following:

1. integrated reading, writing, oral communication curricula

2. whole language usage

3. hands-on approach

4. course context is job-specific

CLASS 1

The instructor will present an overview of the importance of workplace communications. Student observations will be solicited and discussed. Instructor will show video on "Communicating in the Workplace."

The instructor will guide the students to identifying negative and positive communication examples illustrated in the video and their concomitant results.

The instructor will present the course rationale and plan of action, course content, and the major role of the students in guiding course emphasis and activities.

Class activity: **Writing Directions**

1. Small groups will write a set of directions regarding a common household task, such as doing the laundry, from sorting to folding.
2. The set of directions drawn up by each group will be put on board for class critiques.
3. Instructor will try to draw from class deductions about clear direction writing.
4. The instructor will present a list of suggestions for writing directions, filling in any gaps that may have been left by students.
5. Whole class will now revise first set of directions.
6. Repeat small group exercise, this time using directions pertaining to their work.

CLASS 2

The instructor will present skills involved in reading charts, tables, and graphs. Students will do cooperative learning in small groups while practicing these skills.

Students will be given one particular workplace chart to interpret. They are to individually record the information garnered from this reading and to put it into a memo to their supervisors. When this is done, the instructor will teach the following about memos:

1. their importance
2. formula: shortness, simplicity, strength of verbs, sincerity
3. content
4. effective openings

Students will now be directed to rewrite their memos according to suggested memo writing lesson, or to leave as is, if satisfied.

Instructor will use student volunteers to share memos, and critique as group.

CLASS 3

Note: Curriculum Integration

At this point, students have gathered workplace information from charts, graphs, tables; they have taken this information and put into narrative form as a memo; students will now learn and practice effective ways of sharing the same information orally.

The instructor will introduce the four styles of communication: **Bold, Expressive, Sympathetic, Technical**

Do's and Don't's of effective communication.

Class Exercise:

In pairs, students will role-play sharing information garnered from reading, and explained in memos, in conversation with a subordinate.

The instructor will elicit current concerns from supervisors that might require written communication with their superiors. A memo topic or topics will be chosen.

The instructor will continue instructions from "memo writing" lesson.

weak openings vs. strong openings

how to create effective memos

Students will work on memos individually, but will critique each other in pairs. After redoing memos following partnered collaboration, students may rewrite memos. At this point, the instructor will make time to meet with each student individually for evaluation and assistance in memo writing.

CLASS 4

The instructor will teach skills of effective reading and giving of directions.

Students will collaborate, in pairs, in turn reading various sets of directions and giving those same directions. The instructor circulates to evaluate and give assistance.

Class discussion:

1. How did you feel when you were giving direction?
2. Why did you feel that way?

As a supervisor it is important to display good listening traits. What are they?

control distractions
show others that you are listening
active listening
building rapport
non-verbal messages

Video: The Effective Listener

Work-related practice using listening skills

Assignment: Observe and note listening behaviors of those around you, at home and at work. Come to class and be prepared to discuss.

CLASSES 5, 6, 7, AND 8

Class Activities: Workplace Form Completion

1. The instructor begins this unit with a discussion of the importance of accuracy in the completion of workplace forms. Students will be asked to volunteer words that are commonly used in the completion of forms. The words will be put on charts, with suggested and corrected spellings rendered. The instructor will discuss spelling rules and exceptions that apply to the work-specific words.

2. Supervisors, over the course of these 4 classes, will do the following: practice filling out each type of form using a suggested scenario; check their own as well as each other's work for spelling, legibility, and clarity.

3. "Workplace spelling demons" will be learned and practiced by the students.

Class Activities: Practice in changing written to oral communication

1. The instructor will lead a discussion in how oral communication differs from written communication. What skills are needed to convey a message in writing? (spelling, legibility, succinctness) Contrast to what is needed in oral communication

2. The instructor will set up role playing situations involving information conveyed in the workplace forms. For example, an Accident Report will become an oral presentation to a member of the managerial staff.

CLASSES 9, 10, 11, and 12

Class Activities: Making and responding to requests

The instructor will lead a discussion on the importance of a supervisor's skill in this area, and discuss all of the types of requests found in the workplace that call for oral as well as written skill related to this topic:

Requests call for ACTION, INFORMATION, and/or PERMISSION. Discussion of importance of recognizing TYPE of request in order to respond effecitvely. Students will watch the video "Making and Responding to Requests: An Introduction," in order to complete the following assignments.

Find an example of each kind of request.

Choose one request and tell whether it was effective. Why or why not?

Prepare to discuss and support opinions.

Class assignment: Ask that the students make a conscious effort while on their next shift to observe other employees, including management, as they make requests. Have supervisors summarize their observations and put this summary into a MEMO to the instructor. Suggestions for improvement should be included. The instructor will ask for volunteers to read their memos which will serve as the basis for class discussion and perhaps, debate.

Role play activities using same situations as observed ruing observation exercises. Role play as observed, discuss problems observed, and then demonstrate how requests can be made or responded to in more effective manner.

WRITTEN REQUESTS

General characteristics of business correspondence: planning, drafting, revising

Special features of INQUIRIES, ORDERS, CLAIMS

Practice drafting, reviewing, and revising (Content and situations will be drawn from workplace experiences.

CLASSES 13, 14, 15 and 16

Class Activities: Following and Giving Directions, Oral/Written

Class Discussion on the importance of following and giving directions.

Class will see video, Introduction to Following and Giving Directions.

1. The instructor will teach a three step process: Planning, Checking, Clarifying

2. The group will construct a flow chart, using a selected workplace situation, showing the dynamics of the three step process for directions.

3. Students will perform a self-evaluation of their own skills using the three step process as a benchmark for performance.

4. The instructor will explain concepts of "active listening" and "active following" as used in oral directions.

5. The students will perform various role play situations, using workplace situations, using peer and instructor feedback.

6. Discuss various types of directions pertaining to the workplace, both oral and written.

7. The instructor will present various workplace forms which give directions, including graphics, and students will perform various activities showing how well they can follow written directions.

8. The instructor will give the characteristics of good oral directions (from Applied Communication series).

9. Role play practice giving oral directions, using management's materials.

10. Each supervisor is to choose a task from his/her department, and pretend that he must explain how to operate an important piece of machinery, IN WRITING, to a new employee. Supervisors will share their work with the class in role play situations, with peers critiquing.

CLASSES 17 and 18

Class Activities: Preparing Job Evaluations

1. Teacher-led discussion of the importance of evaluating performance in the workplace, methods used, and steps involved

2. Video, Performance Evaluation, and discussion

3. Examination of workplace evaluation forms

4. Students will evaluate each employee under their supervision, using the methods discussed, practicing all of the grammar, spelling, and written communication skills learned.

5. The instructor will solicit the common words used by all of the supervisors in their evaluations. A spelling list will be drawn up from this activity, and again, "workplace spelling demons" will be analyzed, assigned memory techniques, and studied.

6. Students' sentence structure will be examined and remediated, if necessary.

CLASSES 19 and 20

Class Activities: Review concepts and practices of all previous classes, post test.